

FGBC: In Light of Last Days: What's your 1000-year plan?

2 Peter 3:1-9

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Something that really gets me going is investing. I enjoy it. I like real estate; it feels like fun to me. And so I study it, I take classes, I get advice and try I to surround myself with people who know more than I do.

And one of the pieces of advice I've received is the necessity of having a goal. If you are going to be successful in real estate, you need a picture of what your future holds. The idea is you need to know what success looks like in order to arrive there.

Now in real estate this is relative. If you've got a goal of \$50,000 or \$100,000 a year in passive income that's fine, but you need to keep this picture in your head all the time so that it can motivate you to get there.

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Following Jesus is a bit like this except that the goal isn't relative it's absolute. There is a single event that sits at the center of the Christian faith and has fueled the inspiration of countless Christians for the last 2000 years. It has motivated women and men to live their lives to the glory of God. And that event is the victorious return of Christ. Friends, Jesus is coming back!

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Now I think sometimes we can fall into thinking this is a side issue for Christianity, but it isn't. In fact, next to faith, the ultimate return of God to the world as judge and king is the most discussed topic in scripture.

This means that for every verse in scripture about Jesus' first coming there are eight verses about His second coming - scholars have identified some 1845 references.

17 books in the Old Testament refer to the "Day of the Lord" which is when God will show up at the end. And of the 27 books in the New Testament 23 talk about this.¹

What this means is Isaiah and Ezekiel and Daniel and Micah and Amos all talk about this, but so do Peter and Paul and Jude and ultimately Jesus. And all of them agree on a couple of things.

The first is that the Day of the Lord is going to start out being a really, really terrible day. It's a day of judgment and destruction. But it ends up being a really, really amazing day. It's the day the elect begin living with God like we were created to do in the beginning. So Jesus says:

¹ Facts cited from David Jeremiah <https://www.davidjeremiah.org/age-of-signs/5-facts-about-the-second-coming-of-christ> (Accessed August 16, 2019)

The sun will be darkened,
 the moon will give no light,
 the stars will fall from the sky,
 and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

And then at last, the sign that the Son of Man is coming will appear in the heavens, and there will be deep mourning among all the peoples of the earth. (Matthew 24:29-30)

It's going to be terrible. But He also says:

Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in Me. There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with Me where I am. (John 14:1-3)

It's going to be awesome. And this is one of the great themes of scripture. And the point of this theme is to inspire a goal in each of our hearts: "I want to be able to stand when that Day arrives. I don't want to be swept away."

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Alright, go ahead and grab your Bible. Open up to 2nd Peter 3. And as you're turning there I'll bring you up to speed.

2nd Peter is about knowing where we stand with Christ. Peter wants Jesus followers to be assured of their salvation which is a great thing about Christianity.

Every other religion is about being good enough and you never know if you've arrived. But in Christianity the foundation is that none of us can earn anything from God and everyone who tries fails. But, while it is impossible for us to climb up to salvation, YHWH has always been the God who climbs down to us. All scripture tells this story. This is the story of the tower of Babel at the beginning. This is Israel's story, and of course this is the story of the incarnation, the cross and the resurrection.

And the word we use for this is grace. Grace is when we get something we don't deserve. So you aren't a good person. You're a rebellious sinner who has all sought to be God in your own life. But in spite of that Jesus has offered to take your sin upon Himself and clothe you in His righteousness. And if you receive Jesus' gift then when the Father looks at you He sees the perfection of His Son. You're not a sinner to Him, you're His child, you're a saint.

Now Peter says “yes” to all that, but then he says “You need to make sure you’ve actually received Jesus’ gift.” If you have then you aren’t the same as you were. Something changes, and what changes is love. People who have received Jesus’ gift of grace fall in love with Jesus and seek to live their life in a way that pleases Him. These people can be assured they are saved. If you love Jesus you’re saved. He says:

So, dear brothers and sisters, work hard to prove that you really are among those God has called and chosen. Do these things, and you will never fall away. Then God will give you a grand entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:10-11)

So salvation is by grace not works, but it results in a life lived to the glory of God. So work hard to live for God’s glory because people who do this are the ones who have been saved. If you love God you work hard to show that you love God. Make sense?

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That’s point 1 for Peter, but then he goes to point 2. There are some things that can steal assurance. So in chapter 2 Peter lambastes false teachers in his day and ours who seek to relax the Christian standard for sexual holiness.

Peter says “Hey, I live in a culture where sexual freedom is preached as a virtue” – and what do you know nothing has changed – that’s the world we live in. But Peter says this is a trap. There is no such thing as sexual freedom. If you have sex freely it becomes your master and your god. That’s why our world is totally fixated on it. But sex makes a terrible god. It will leave you empty and unfulfilled in the end. So make Jesus your God and give your sexuality to Him. Save it for where He says it belongs – inside marriage. Only when Jesus is your God will you have joy – that’s chapter 2.

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And now in chapter 3 Peter wants to look at another threat against assurance of salvation and that is an apathetic disinterest or even disbelief in the return of Christ. Let me read this for you starting in 2nd Peter chapter 3 verse 1.

[Read 2 Peter 3:1-10]

So Peter’s talking about people, scoffers, who deny that Jesus is coming back. And Peter says if you do not protect your faith from these scoffers you will lose everything because you will be visionless. Without the conviction that Jesus is coming back you aren’t going to live like you are going anywhere; you aren’t going to live like it matters. And the problem with that is does matter. People who don’t make every effort to live for Jesus’ glory haven’t been saved by His grace. So we need to protect ourselves from these scoffers.

And to do that we need to be people of vision who look three places. We need to look back, we need to look around and we need to look to the future.²

² Outline adapted from Skip Heitzig

http://skipheitzig.com/teachings_view.asp?ServiceID=3096&transcript=1#transcript (Accessed August 16, 2019)

First we need to look back to the prophets. So, in verses 1 and 2 Peter says the reason I wrote this letter is to remind you. And actually here he's reminding us that he's reminded us already back in chapter 1. But he does this because he's aware of something crazy about us. And that is that we can encounter the God of the universe and somehow treat that as no big deal – this is what Balaam did last week, and it's a huge risk to us.

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Friends have you ever been hard on the Old Testament Jews? I mean after all they saw the plagues in Egypt, they walked through the Red Sea, they ate mana and massive hail fell from heaven right on the heads of their enemies and yet when Moses is up the mountain for 40 days they are like “Hey, let's worship a golden calf because it looks like God has abandoned us.” Have you ever felt they were a bit dull?

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The problem with that is they are us! I was cold and stranded out of town in a car without keys and it started when we prayed. I was a broke student when an unexpected cheque for thousands of dollars showed up the day after Nikki stopped working on Sundays. My mom recovered from stage 4 esophagus cancer while the other 29 people in her cohort died and now my dad has recovered from stage 4 bone cancer. I've seen God's fingerprints all over my life and yet I can walk outside next to my unbelieving neighbours and feel like I don't have anything to offer. Friends, that officially makes me the worst, most wickedly forgetful, ungrateful sinner ever!

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Am I exaggerating? What about you? Think you've got me beat? Paul says “Hey we don't need to fight, we can all win this one. He says:

This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”—and I am the worst of them all. (1 Timothy 1:15)

I think Peter probably arm-wrestled Paul about, but here Peter wants to show us the hope in this. Just because this is our default doesn't mean we wallow in it. No! Jesus loving people practice remembering. And we do this is by looking to the prophets.

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One of the big things God fixated the prophets hearts on was the Day of the Lord. This really really terrible day that turns into a really really awesome day. The day God shows up and brings about the greatest distress the world has ever known and initiates the one thing humanity was created for in the beginning – life with God.

Now we need to hold both sides of this coin together, it's terrible and amazing, but it is terrible first. You see God isn't a warm fuzzy in the sky who accepts everyone in the end. Isaiah writes:

Scream in terror, for the day of the LORD has arrived—
the time for the Almighty to destroy. (Isaiah 13:6)

And Amos warns people:

What sorrow awaits you who say,
 "If only the day of the LORD were here!"
 You have no idea what you are wishing for.
 That day will bring darkness, not light. (Amos 5:18)

And Jesus describes the day He will return as a day of "great distress in the land and wrath against this people."³ So Peter says "take this into account. Recall it. Remember it. Let the prophets stimulate you.

So what stimulates you? What do you get excited about? What goal do you want to arrive at and how are you making sure you are going to get there? Are you in the Bible? Friends, get into the Bible every day.

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Look back at the prophets, but also look around at these scoffers. We get this in verses 3 to 7.

Now if you've ever been a student – particularly a college or university student – and mentioned that you are a Christian, you know what scoffers are. Today it is cool to be tolerant of everyone and aggressively anti-Christian at the same time. So if you believe in God and heaven and hell and seek to live your life by biblical standards then people are going to laugh – they are going to scoff. But what you need to do is find out why.

If an adult believes in the Easter bunny you should scoff, but Peter says these people aren't scoffing because what we say doesn't make sense. In verses 3 and 5 he says they scoff because "they want to follow their own evil desires" and so "they deliberately forget" about God. Do you see that?

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Every now and then I bump into people who used to be Christians and now aren't – maybe you do too. And I've noticed something interesting – this isn't a scientific study, it's just my observation. But almost all of them have given themselves to lust.

So one of my cousins just decided to leave Christianity behind. He grew up in a strong faith home. He married a Christian girl and was a program director in a Bible camp for a bunch of years. And now boom, he's agnostic. And at first this was a shock – "what did you come across that convinced you to that Jesus wasn't real? What did you learn?" And then I find out that he's been having an affair and it makes sense. Of course believing in God would put a cramp on your style if you wanted to live like that.

That's what Peter is talking about. He says, look around; these people are searching for reasons not to believe. And so in verse 4 they say "Where is this 'coming' He promised?" It's been 2000 years and there hasn't been any 'coming'. Supernatural stuff doesn't happen, life is just full of normal stuff. And it's been this way forever.

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³ Luke 21:23

I love how the Bible was written thousands of years ago but is totally current. What Peter's talking about is the major belief structure of today.

So in the 19th century a geologist named Eric Lyle writes a paper on something called "uniformitarianism" – I know big word – it's the idea that everything has always happened just like this and it always will. So there are these laws of nature that govern everything and they don't change. And this paper gets a lot of press and eventually a guy named Charles Darwin takes it with him to the Galapagos where he invents the theory of evolution.

Now at a base level uniformitarianism is a good thing. I'm glad that I don't have to wake up every morning and wonder whether gravity is on or off today – that would be a major stressor! But that kind of stuff is only the periphery of the concept. The big idea that Lyle and Darwin were excited about was the removal of the Supernatural from the equation. They wanted a world totally explainable without God or miracles.

And this is big today, but it's nothing new. Peter says people were talking about this 2000 years ago and they were as wrong then as they are today. You see things haven't always happened the way they are happening now. God has always intervened.

So Peter says the universe we are living in hasn't been here forever, it came from somewhere. And the day it all started wasn't a normal day. Creation was a pretty big something different kind of day. And the people in Noah's day mocked him for building a boat in the middle of what is modern day Iraq. They said "it never rains here, and it's never going to." But then a not normal day happened. You see the laws of nature don't govern the universe God governs the universe.

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Now Peter doesn't think gravity might disappear today or tomorrow – God's not arbitrary. But he does want you to know that just because the universe has laws doesn't mean that God is governed by them. The miraculous is historical fact. Peter could have cited any number of times God interacted with creation because He is continually, miraculously sticking His fingers into our lives. And miracles are never normal – that's the point. And so, because a supernatural God is in control it's not surprising that He would have a plan to bring life as we know it to an end and start something new. This is just what a Supernatural being does with a natural world.

And Peter says don't deliberately forget this. Don't turn a blind eye to God's involvement in the world like these scoffers. Recognize it and let it change the way you live.

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So Peter says look back at the prophets who saw this coming, look around at the scoffers who want to live as though God isn't real, and in verses 8 to 10, look forward to Christ's return.

Now Peter knows we are going to wonder about this. It's been 2000 years since Jesus was walking around – that's a long time. Are we really sure He's coming back?

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But Peter's got two responses for this, the first is "God's not being slow." Time is different for God than it is for us. When you are eternal and see the end and the beginning together then time is kind of irrelevant. So a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day.

God's like Gandalf who is never late, he shows up precisely when he means to. And so second, Peter says there's a reason why He is waiting. He's being patient and giving us time to repent.

And I, for one, am happy about that. I want to spend eternity with the God of the universe. I think that's going to be awesome!

Get this, we serve an infinitely creative God so when we get to heaven He isn't going to be like "Well, I did the whole earth thing, it worked out okay, but I guess I'm done. Let's just sit around on clouds and jam harp music for a bit." No! There is going to be more creation. And it's going to be better and better than before. And God has invited us to be part of it with Him.

If He brought all this to a conclusion 1500 years ago then I'd be missing out. And here's the crazy thing – so would He. You see God created humanity because He wants to share Himself with us. He wants to surround Himself with million and million of people to love and worship and join Him in what He is doing for all eternity. That's why we exist.

And so Peter wants to spur us on to wholesome thinking. He wants us to be people who respond to Jesus' incredible gift of grace with real love – love that makes every effort to confirm our election. And so he tells us keep your eyes on the goal.

If we are going to arrive we need to know where we are going, and Peter says all of creation is stepping continually closer to a moment of culmination when the trumpet will sound and Christ will return. It's not going to be a day like any other. It's going to be terrible and awesome and what side of the coin it is going to be for each of us is dependant on how we live today.

So friends, keep your eyes on your 1000 year plan. Don't fall in to foolishly living like today is the only one that matters. Invest yourself in the long haul so that you actually arrive where you want to arrive. Jesus loves you and is coming back so make every effort to confirm your election.